

[Mary Anne Meehan]

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1

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon on a cold blustery spring day. The sun had definitely retired and the fire in the old Franklin stove was more than welcome.

Mary Anne Meehan and I sat in front of the open grate sipping our tea and munching on some English muffins. I had gone to considerable trouble to get those muffins, Mary Anne in especially fond of them and I was anxious to get the lady in as mellow a mood as 'twas possible. I wanted her to talk.

"Shall I turn on the lights?" I asked.

"Oh, no, don't, let's stay jest as we are, I like it like this." replied my guest.

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So we sat in silence for a while, watching the little flames leap back and forth like playful kittens. Then-finally, I said, "Did your Mother ever tell you much about Ireland, how they did things when she was a girl, their superstitions and all that?"

"She sure did, many an' many's th' time - if she was here now, jest this minute, settin' before this warm fire, she'd probably be after tellin' us lots of things. She loved th' 'gloamin', like she called it."

"Tell me some of the stories she used to tell you." I coaxed.

"Well, I don't know as I mind, let - me - think - she used to tell us about th' fairies - youh know th' Irish believe in fairies. Anyhow, they used to. They called them, 'the little people', then she told what they did at wakes - what they said when youh go in an' when youh leave someone's house. What kind of thing do youh want to hear about?"

"Oh, anything, just tell me whatever comes to your mind."

2

"Well, here's some sayin's I remember an' some toasts. Here's an' old sayin' that means jest th' same as our 'Never put off 'till tomorrow what youh can do today'. Th' Irish have it this way. 'time enough, lost th' ducks.' Then 'It's a poor hin who can't scratch for itself.' Then another, 'A daughter-in-law an' a mother -in-law are like a cat an' mouse facin' each other.' Then here's a good one, 'Beware of th' horns of a bull, th' heels of a mule, an' th' smile of a Englishmen.' That shows how some felt about th' English, don't it? My mother used to say 'I don't like th' English, God save their souls.'

"Oh, here's another I remember, 'th' owner of a cow should be at th' tail of her himself.'

"I don't quite get th' meaning of that, do you Mary Anne?"

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“Sure, it's as plain as th' nose on your face. When a cow falls in a bog hole an' my mother said they was always doin' it 'cause they get plenty of those pesky things in Ireland, an' th' only way to get th' cow out was to pull her out by th' tail. Everybody was willin' to help an' do their share but they was always thinkin' it would be best for himself to be at th' cow's tail.”

“Simple and sane,” was my offering.

“Sure enough. Here's a wise one. 'thirst is th' end of drink an' sorrow is th' end of love.' What do youh think about this one, is it a riddle, I don't know meself? (As Mary Anne related her mother's sayings I noticed she took on many of the Irish idioms.)

3

“Well, here 'tis. 'What is there that seems worse to a man than his death an' yit he does not know but it may be th' height of his good luck.' Do youh know th' answer?”

I didn't.

“Here's some toast's, 'May th' devil fly away with th' roof of th' house where ye an' me aren't wanted.' Here's another, 'silk for youh an' wool for me but enough of drink for both of us,' an' 'to thousands of men come thousands of different hopes.' There's one I liked especially, “Here's wishin' good health an' long life to yez, an' th' choice of th' girls for a wife to yez, An' your land without penny of rint to yez, If these three blessin's are sint to yez Then there'll be peace an' contint to yez.

“Nice, huh? I don't believe I can think of any more jest now.”

“Well, tell me something about the fairies, why do they seem to be in such great numbers in Ireland, there seems to be so many more there than in any other part of the world?”

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"Some countries ain't over good to fairies, but th' Irish always have been. Youh see folks never know but what a stranger may be a fairy in disguise-besides th' Irish like 'em. That's why there are so many there, an' why they do be doin' so many good things for th' Irish.

"Did youh ever hear how they come to be fairies? Youh didn't? Well, it seems one day God got up from his throne to look after something an' when he went back to set down again, Lucifer was settin' in Good's God's place on the throne. Then Hell was made in a minute. (My mother told us this 4 lots of times.) God moved his hand an' swept away thousands of angels, an' he was goin' to sweep away thousands more. Then the Angel Gabriel said to God, 'Oh, please God, stop or there won't be anybody left in Heaven.' 'All right,' said God, 'I'll stop, them that are in Heaven, let 'em stay here, them that are in hell, let 'em stay there, them that are between heaven an' hell, let 'em stay in th' air.' An' th' angels that remained between heaven an' hell are th' fairies."

"Mary Anne, do you mean to say that God was in a temper when he moved his hand?"

"Sounds s' if he was mad, don't it? But I don't know anythin' 'bout it, all I'm doin' is repeatin' my mother's story. I never asked.

"Some fairy's are naughty an' they turn th' milk sour if th' farmer or his wife does anythin' to displease them. There was a young man who lived near my mother an' he drove a hearse an' he used to see fairies jest before somebody died an' he'd get all ready for a trip an' he never was wrong. An' she said there used to be a coach without any horses that would glide down th' road an' that always meant a death, it was sort-a like a shadow coach.

"If any one was afraid an' youh wanted to go on a errand all youh had to do to protect yourself was to carry a piece of coal in your pocket an' that would be a charm against th' bad fairies. They said there was more fairies in Kilarney then in any place in Ireland. Once there was a wicked land agent who tried to do a farmer who was a hunchback . this This

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farmer had been real good to th' fairies an' so to help him with th' 5 land / agent, they took his hump off an' put it on th' land agent. So youh see it paid to be kind to th' fairies.

"My mother said she knew lots of folks who had heard a banshee but she only knew one man who said he had actually seen one.

"But me mother said th' old people said they'd seen many a fairy in th' lonely places in th' hills, they was little wee folks. Here is one of th' stories we had our mother tell us over an' over.

"There was a young man who wasn't afraid of fairies or ghosts, well one night he was on his way home when he sees comin' toward him three men all dressed in black, carrin' a coffin. He thought it was strange that there want four men instead of three, so he went up an' took hold of th' end where he thought th' fourth man ought to be, nobody said a word to him an' he didn't say a word to them. Well, they kept on walkin' a little ways when all at once they let th' coffin down to take a rest, it looked like, when,— away they went - out of sight. Just as th' coffin touched th' ground th' men disappeared. Th' young man thought that was sort-a funny, so he opened th' lid of th' coffin he sees a beautiful young girl a-lyin' there an' she had her eyes open an' she was smilin'. Well, was he surprised. He helped her out of th' coffin an' tried to talk to her but pretty soon he saw she was dumb, so, he took her to his home where his father an' mother lived.

"Well, about a year or so after that he was walkin' by that very sopt where th' coffin had been set down an' he heard a voice an' he stopped 'cause he thought some one was speakin' to him but they want, 6 but he heard what they said. It was a man's voice an' it said, 'It's been over a year since he took th' girl away from us.' An' then he heard another voice, an' this was a man, too, 'Well, she was so dumb he couldn't get much happiness out of her an' of course he never thought to pull out th the silver pin back of her ear.

"Well, was th' young man excited - he sure was, so he ran home an' looked behind her ear, an' sure enough there was the silver pin an' he pulled it out an' did she talk — she

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said she had been stolen by th' fairies over a year before - th' fairies believed her father had been unjust to 'em.

"So, she sez to him, 'If you'll get me some wool, I'll knit youh a waistcoat.' He didn't want a waistcoat but she kept at him an' so, by an' by, he got th' wool an' she knitted th' waistcoat, an' then she said, 'Now ye go to th' fair an' there is a green house there an' youh go to th' door an' a old man will come an' youh let him see th' waistcoat.'

"So, th' young did as he was told an' th' old man got all agitated when he seen him an' he asted who knit th' waistcoat an' he sez there's only one person could have knitted that vest an' th' fairies took her away for revenge on him.

"So, th' young lad took th' old man to his home an' when th' girl an' he laid eyes on each other they was so happy - they laughed an' cried, for th' old man was her father.

"So, th' young man an' th' girl was married an' th' girl's father 7 gave them a fortune an' it is said his family have never been [withou?] without all th' money they want.

"In some places in Ireland they say there are 'fairy trees', that if youh get some of th' leaves youh will always have good luck.

"Youh should always leave a saucer of cream ready for th' fairies on Hallow Halloween , for if youh do it makes them friendly to youh, they are supposed to be everywhere that night. An' youh mustn't eat blackberries after th' first of November because the fairies are supposed on Hallow Halloween Eve to put some kind of blight on th' berries that makes it bad for eatin!

"Some of th' cures th' Irish have are awful, funny my mother knew a an old woman who could tell by feelin' of your ears if youh was goin' to die or get well that is, if youh was sick.

"They called whoopin' cough, 'chin cough'. Lots of Irish mothers take th' child that has 'chin cough' out on a road an' then they wait till a man comes ridin' along on a white horse. Th'

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mother stops th' man, tells him what ai ails th' child an' asts him what he thinks she had better do for it an' no matter what he sez, she does it an' th' child gets well right away.

"Youh can cure a sty, they think, by puttin' seven thorns from a gooseberry bush on th' sty.

"A boy was bit by a dog-my mother knew th' family an' all about it. Th' dog owner was scared 'cause he didn't know what th' boy's father would do. Well, anyway, th' boy's father come to see th' dog's owner an' said he had a request to make. Th' owner was scared stiff but 8 tried to look comfortable an' he sez, 'What's th' favor? Th' boy's father [hemmed?] an' hawed an' of course this got th' owner petrified with fear. Finally th' father said, 'I don't like to ask it but would youh give me a hair out of th' dog's tail?' Th' owner couldn't believe his ears, so, he said, 'sure, take all th' hairs youh want, take th' tail if youh want to.' 'sure, that'd be too much altogether,' sez th' father, 'All I want is a hair to lay on th' bite in th' young lad's leg that way no harm would come to it.'"

"Sure, what am I sittin' here for, tellin' youh such goings-on. My, mother told me all these things - God rest her soul - and my poor mother wouldn't be tellin' a lie if her life depended on it. I often thought though, she had a twinkle in her eye when she told them to us kids. Go on now with youh - I'll tell youh no more."

When Mary Anne says she won't - she doesn't. The rest of the evening, I talked and she asked questions.